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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a practicum designed to give 12 low-achieving first-grade children more time to improve their communication skills, to promote knowledge development, and to motivate children to become enthusiastic about the reading and writing process. Whole language, creative drama, and different styles of writing were utilized in the classroom to accomplish the practicum outcomes during a 3-month period. Checklists, questionnaires, and surveys were used in collecting data. Data showed that: (1) children chose books when their work was completed; (2) they read orally in groups and independently, and could relate many of their favorite stories because the classroom was encompassed with books; and (3) their writing activities reflected a variety of experiences. (Eight tables of data are included. Five appendixes contain a checklist for basal reader problems, teacher questionnaire, checklist for writing, attitude toward reading survey, and survey questions for teachers.) (Author/SR)

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Improving Communication Skills of First Grade Low Achievers Through Whole Language, Creative Drama, and Different Styles of writing

by

Audrey J. Flennoy

Cluster XXXXII

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A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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Approved:

11/20/92
Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

Improving Communication Skills of First Grade Low Achievers. Flennoy, Audrey, 1992. Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Low Achievers/Whole Language Shared Experience/Books Strategies/Self-Direction Procedure/Journal writing Reading Groups/Buddies Program Integration/Content Area Parent Involvement/Classroom Literature/Drama

The goal of this practicum was that the children would have more time to improve their communication skills. Another goal was to promote knowledge development and motivate children to become enthusiastic about the reading and writing process.

Whole language, creative drama, and different styles of writing were utilized in the classroom during the three month period to accomplish the practicum outcomes. Checklists, questionnaires, and surveys were used in collecting data.

Outcomes of this practicum were accomplished successfully. The data from this practicum confirmed the following: (a) children chose books when their work was completed, (b) they read orally in groups and independently, and could relate many of their favorite stories because the classroom was encompassed with books, and (c) their writing activities reflected a variety of experiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The work setting was an elementary school in a neighborhood of a large, metropolitan, northwestern city. It is encompassed by resurgent housing, boarded-up buildings, vacant lots and homes that are awaiting demolition. The total population is 33,865, and 99 percent black. The total male population is 15,610, and the total female is 18,255. The soci -economic status of these families is low to lower middle class income level. One of the highlights of the community is the easy access to the expressway, bus lines, and trains. Two of the prime assets of this community are the Spanish baroque-style fieldhouse, and English Field Park Conservatory.

The school opened in 1965 servicing grades kindergarten through five, with a student population of 567. Presently the school has a population of 781, servicing kindergarten through eighth grade. The school is 100 percent black. The teaching staff of 38 consists of the following composition: 68% black, and 32% white.

The school has been recognized internationally

because of its Paideia program. The Paideia program is the Socratic seminar and its purpose is to: improve language skills, develop problem solving skills, increase reading achievement, increase knowledge of rich literary works, relate universal human ideas to personal experiences, promote creativity, and develop and enhance decision making skills. The curriculum also includes: french, science, math, writing, and reading. Other programs include: ESEA, Augmented Staff, Reading Recovery, AT&T Writers Workbench, IBM Primary Writing to Read Lab, Chapter 1 - IRIP, Intensive Reading, and Chapter 1 - IMIP, Intensive Mathematics.

The school encourages the parents to create an environment that will encourage their children to explore, to learn about, and to become more engrossed in refining their knowledge, and to become more interested in expanding their skills. Parents are also encouraged and invited to serve as volunteers in the school to help enhance their children's learning, as well as become more cognizant of the school's purposes and how they can better support the program.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer's teaching responsibilities include the instruction of a first grade class in reading and related activities and as a Reading Recovery Teacher. She holds

a Master's Degree in Elementary Education, Educational Administration and Supervision, and Reading. She has received state certification for elementary Kg-3 Teaching, Reading K-12 Teaching and Supervision, and General Administration. She also has a Bachelor of Science Degree in English. Her experience includes: teaching at the elementary level, teaching reading at the elementary level, teaching at the high school level, serving as senior class sponsor, serving as team leader, and serving as head teacher. Her primary concern is to have students develop self-confidence and achieve at high levels of academic performance.

Her role involves teaching reading to first grade children using a basal text. The objective of the teacher is to help children master skills for effective reading, and prepare them for mandatory standardized testing. Her role also involves working with four children each day in a thirty minute lesson. As the teacher works with the children they read several books and write stories and messages of their own. This program has emphasis on preventing failure for the at-risk first graders. As these students are provided with more intensive instruction learning to use sounds and write, the teacher is observing and planning a more challenging instructional program.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The children had little time for exposure to communication experiences after completing the basal reading series stories and accompanying workbook pages, spelling, phonic drills, and tests. The basal reader is comprised of a series of commercially arranged books and augmented materials. The basal program is a highly structured series that often requires group instruction.. The teacher divided the children into small groups ranging from ten to twelve children into three groups. She organized the groups with special attention toward classroom behavior, work habits, personality, and ability.

The low achievers learn at a slower rate, and are usually functioning at a level lower than their classmates. They need more attention, repetition, concrete experiences, and a language approach to reading. The low achiever benefits more from books that have repetitive patterns and materials that can invigorate his/her background. They needed a different approach for writing, as well as more experience with creative drama, and choral readings.

Problem Documentation

The presence of this problem was documented by interviews, observation, questionnaires, and student work. During a two week period in September, 1991, the low achievers comprised of twelve children spent approximately 90-120 minutes on an average day to complete basal reader activities. During this time the children were having problems comprehending their function and this caused them to operate at a much slower pace. The children were observed for a week and the record shows that all of the children were not able to choose books after finishing morning seatwork because of the time spent on the basal activities.

Table 1

Summary of Responses

From Basal Program

	Number of children	1st Friday Yes	1st Friday No	2nd Friday Yes	2nd Friday No
1. Did the child spend 90-120 minutes completing basal reader activities?	12	12	0	12	0
2. Did the child choose books to read after finishing morning work?	12		12		

*During the two week period of October

As can be seen from the data in Table 1, twelve students were observed and 12 students out of 12 spent approximately 90-120 minutes to complete basal reader activities each day for a week. In addition, 12 students out of 12 did not choose a book to read after finishing morning work. The result indicated that a problem existed and there was a reason for considering an alternative to the existing program that would give the children an

Table 2

Summary of Responses From Questionnaire

Question	Number of Children	Basal	Non-basal	Yes	No
1. Name a story that you enjoy.	12	12			
2. Do you red books at home?	12			4	8
3. Do you listen to stories at home?	12			3	9
4. What stories do you enjoy reading in school?	12	12			
5. What is your favorite story?	12	12			

opportunity to be involved more in a program to help them improve their communication skills.

For two weeks in October, 1991, children were interviewed on Friday and asked what their favorite story was that they had listened to or heard. The children did not relate an interest in the basal reader stories.

Table 2 summarizes and provides the complete data of the student's responses. Of the 12 students 12 named a

Table 3

Summary of Writing Observation Checklist

	Number of Children	Yes	No
1. Does the child maintain appropriate spacing between words?	12	2	10
2. Does the child have appropriate letter spacing within words?	12	2	10
3. Does the child need practice in writing sentences?	12	12	
4. Does the student know the mechanics of the language?	12		12
5. Can the child create an idea, or short story?	12	1	11
6. Does the child's stories reflect a variety of experiences?	12		12

non-basal story that they enjoyed, only 4 out of 12 children read books at home, only 3 out of 12 children listen to stories at home, and all of the 12 students enjoyed reading non-basal stories as their favorites.

The information in Table 2 presents facts that the children were not interested in the basal reader stories. Being aware of these facts helped in evaluating and assessing the basal reader program.

The low achievers in first grade were just beginning to dictate for writing activities because of the problem of enlarging and refining their use of words so that they had several alternatives from which to choose. As can be seen from the data in Table 3, the children are having difficulty with written communication.

Causative Analyses

There are several causes that contributed to the problem. The Board of Education provides and supports communication instruction as specified in the basal reader. There is much time that is spent on instructional activities proscribed by the basal reader program that hardly any time is left for communication skills.

The teachers are given manuals to follow when teaching the reading and related activities. They are expected to follow very closely what they are to do and say doing the lessons. Many of the teachers in the

schools are skeptical about the success of the basal program for the low achiever.

It is difficult to improve communication skills of the low achievers because of the activities presented involving the entire class for group lessons. Much of their time is spent on reading and related activities of the basal program. These children need more teacher-centered and more tightly monitored activities. They have language drill on isolated words, using flash cards, vocabulary lists, workbooks, and dittos because this is the basal program.

These children need a program that meets their needs or is designed especially for them. In the regular classroom they are identified as deficient and this compounds their self-esteem that is low, and also impairs them intellectually. Because of the experience that they must be involved in, the low achievers are systematically excluded from learning activities that could facilitate their intellectual development.

The low achievers need opportunities to communicate, because as they use language they will become more skilled in its use. The low achiever must have interaction. As the child interacts he has the opportunity to imitate, compare, and practice. The classroom environment should have language interaction that is continuous, and children should be given opportunities to be formal and informal

using communication experiences in rich situations.

As the teacher tries to create a more responsive classroom to help children talk and write more freely, there must also be an advocation for developing situations where the children can evaluate their articulation of the language.

Many children arrive at school with numerous language variations that affect the language program. There are children who exhibit speech impairments, dialect differences, and other speech deficiencies that interfere with communication. Children bring more articulation problems than speech disorders. These include slurred speech, substitutions, omissions of letters, and distorted sounds.

Children come to school with a lack of motivation to communicate because they have not been taught communication strategies. Many of them have not been exposed to activities that help them to learn to use language in the proper form.

There are differences in teaching practices, learning styles, and teacher-student reaction from one classroom to another. Teachers, in working with children, use their creativity, communication, and sensitivity to the needs of children differently. Some of these teacher's activities may be inconsistent with the integration of learning styles.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Some of the causes of this problem of low achievers learning communication skills are documented in the literature.

Reutzel and Cooter (1990) maintain that there is a lack of instructional efficiency for the low achiever when the basal reading series is used as the sole vehicle of instruction. It is not that basal readers cannot be a good source for teachers in classrooms, but they should be given some interesting follow-up activities that integrate reading with other language arts skills. Children should have other experiences that they can become actively involved in after the basal reading activity.

Goodman (1989) contends that Heymsfeld wants to accept whole language and hang on to the traditional method. She likes how background information of the child is used to integrate whole language instruction, but she also likes the teaching of phonics that the basal reader emphasizes. Whole language, as she sees it, must give the student opportunity to take risk by writing whole and real texts and bring them into agreement with conventional spelling.

She sees deficiencies in the basal, but feels that the basal program is a good program. She feels that the basal helps the child to perceive and interpret, and foster opportunities for changing reading experiences into logic.

Reading is definitely related to language knowledge, and children know that written communication and oral language convey meaning through words, because of the literature in basals. The basals define reading as sequencing of skills, word identification skills, and comprehension skills, but it neglects often to include extensive reading and writing for the development of literacy.

McCallum (1988) reports that basal series play a significant role in the instruction of reading. Approximately, 98% of the teachers in the United States use basal series, specifically, because they address a variety of material related to reading. The series provide a management system that is highly structured and is different from the language experience and the individualized process. It has a different philosophy and the teaching procedure is different. The series is being kept abreast of more current issues within a reasonable time frame. There have also been changes in the teaching techniques which include the present issues. Although there have been revisions of the series, it still does not circumscribe all current conceptions that involve the reading process. The basal approach ignores the realities of the classroom. There should be more opportunities for the children that would interest, facilitate, and challenge them to recognize skills that they readily learn because they understand the need for them.

Other literature gives evidence to the problems created when the basal is the sole form of instruction for communication instruction, and basal readers are responsible for basic reading materials in several of the schools in America.

Venezky (1989) argues that reading materials have gone through changes since the early years of schools. Children were taught reading for the purposes of teaching them religion, morals, and other training procedures. Reading has gone through a change all over the country. The basal has made changes because of many pressures, but it monopolizes half of the day in most schools in the United States, and that this procedure does not demonstrate to children how subskills are related to writing or reading. This program is instrumental in promoting a limited concept of literacy. The reading process to these children consists mainly of doing worksheets, as well as taking tests. Success for them in reading and writing consists of accuracy. The classroom does not provide the encouragement that it should in promoting responsibility, self-determination, and group cooperation.

Fountas and Hannigan (1989) maintain "as children develop an understanding of using language they find that language is essential in solving problems, getting things done, explaining to others, imagining, and pretending."

(p. 135) Children come to school with background knowledge that is rich in spoken language. Children should have experience in writing and reading activities in a natural way as they are experienced in the home. They are empowered through the teacher's encouragement to take risk, hypothesize, and predict. Their activities are integrated with several areas of learning: literature, social studies, science, and math in a creative and meaningful way. The teacher in the classroom must use her skill of the reading process to help children grow. The basal program must be used creatively.

Funk and Funk (1989) declare that "good listening habits enhance and develop different levels of ability." (p. 663) Teachers should assist children in understanding why listening is important, and they should be given listening experiences that provide them with comprehension and retention skills. Children should be given activities that will present them with tasks that set the stage for them to develop good listening skills. They should be involved in activities that emphasize listening experiences: field trips, writing experiences, classroom and art projects.

Hubbard (1986) notes that "the environment of a classroom that has structure which provides a predictable pattern and room for students to have options helps them to be enthusiastic readers and writers." (p.180) A

classroom setting was observed and the classroom environment was structured. The children were permitted to select their own stories for writing and reading. This was a learning classroom because the children shared as they read and wrote. The teacher served in a capacity of motivating children to solve problems and ask questions.

Smith (1989) asserts that "children develop good listening and speaking skills from teachers who read aloud." (p. 320) Children obtain many dividends from being read to : stimulation and increased interest in the appreciation of literature, awareness of similarities and differences, increased speaking and a love of books. They are exposed to a world of events including ideas and feelings. They can expand their understanding of the world about them through vocabulary and concept and written language. Teachers must be knowledgeable about children and books to help create the kind of interest that they should have. The teacher has to model for them how to listen, to love language, and to help them to bring emotions, feelings, and insights to the printed page. Students love to listen to adults read a story over and over again. The students must be surrounded by a wide spectrum of children's literature.

Friedman (1986) notes that "children who write everyday improve in the skill of reading because they decipher and follow written directions." (p. 162) This

teacher explains that her classroom is a writing studio. In the writing process children should be in a warm caring relationship with the teacher in order to have a successful and encouraging writing adventure. They must have numerous experiences in writing about everything because this will enable them to have a wealth of experiences, enrich their abilities, and provide them with purposes, styles, and a variety of subjects. As the children write they experience diversity. They also enjoy writing to penpals, writing letters, and responding to poems as well as stories.

Pinnell (1990) states that "helping children discover reading/writing may be essential in teaching them to become too literate." (p. 169) Some children benefit from being involved in an extra program that will help them to eliminate failure in their reading. The children who are at-risk in the regular classroom find difficulty in trying to focus on a task and reach their potential. As these students undertake the task of reading and writing, they develop good skills. The teacher is the important force in the classroom that helps the children to mature in reading and helps them to develop good self-esteem. Teachers must be sensitive to the feelings of these children to help them to reach their potential. Reading and writing can help children to develop their basic knowledge in becoming independent in solving problems,

becoming literate, and enhancing and exploring.

Rosaen (1990) asserts that "writing can be used in the classroom to promote knowledge development." (p. 424) Writing activities can help students develop logical thinking and grouping facts, seeing associations and predictions. Students can apply critical thingking as they appraise their writing.

Kintisch (1986) notes that "children who continue to relate to their ideas through writing develop a sense of comraderie with other children as they share their ideas." (p. 176) Students who work in pairs are often more successful than being helped by the teacher. Students who help each other have positive effects on their learning and attitudes. When the children share, they come into closer contact with their peer group, they have sense of status, and they also have a better feeling of satisfaction. As they work with their peers, they learn the value of collaboration and their work is responded to continuously and appropriately.

Fagan (1989) says that "writing in children's lives can provide them with writing experiences which are familiar." (p. 577) Children enter school with the knowledge of the importance of reading and writing. They know that communicating ideas and feelings enable them to interact with people. These children are often enthusiastic about the reading and writing process upon

entering school. Often the enthusiasm is blocked because of teachers who are not aware of how important it is to share ideas, to work together to find solutions to problems, and to create a climate in which children are excited about taking risks instead of being afraid to make errors. The children should be introduced to a variety of materials so that they may obtain information and explore ideas.

Morrice and Simmons (1990) state that "whole language helps to motivate students to read and write creatively, and to develop other avenues of literacy." (p. 577) These two teachers organized a Buddies Program which emphasized flexible grouping, sharing, and discussion. They organized the program to stimulate students to be creative in their reading and writing, to interact through the reading of Big Books, and to develop a positive attitude in children. The Buddies Program was instrumental in implementing the whole language experience and active learning. The program fostered language through writing and talking.

The buddy system provided children who were introverts opportunities to exhibit their talent in drama, and to deal with their world by expressing and exploring their personal beliefs and feelings. They were helped to improve their self-concept, increase their awareness in the use of oral language, improve their skill in

the good reader because of his inability to focus on the reading strategies.

Komoski (1985) discusses the importance of textbooks being published to teach children to learn rather than just a selling commodity. People involved in the selection or the publishing of textbooks should understand that these books are not to keep children busy, but to facilitate the learning process.

Clary and Smith (1986) urge teachers, educators, and other concerned adults when selecting basals to consider the practicality and usefulness of the books in the classroom on a daily basis as well as the cost. The books should also relate current research, specific pedagogica techniques, circumstantial material for teachers and students, and practical material that is useful and effective. When teachers use material that does not have the instructional integrity, the teachers must find ways to facilitate learning. Parents would be interested in whether the material would help the children to succeed, the order of placement, and the effectiveness of the instructional level for the good or poor readers.

The children's point of view is very important. Children have made comments about stories being insensible in the basal text, as well as, relating their dislike for the text.

Brozo (1990) found that at-risk learners interact

Chapter III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals

The goal of the practicum was that the children would have more time for improving their communication skills.

A secondary goal was to help the teacher create a more responsive classroom to help children talk and write more freely. It was hoped that situations would be developed that would give the children opportunities to be formal and informal using communication experiences in rich situations.

Expected Outcomes

Upon completion of the twelve week implementation period for this procticum, seven of the twelve targeted students were projected to read a book when assignments were completed. (see Appendix A) Nine of the twelve students would mention several titles when asked about their favorite stories they had heard or read during the week. (see Appendix B) Seven of the twelve children's stories would reflect the variety of experiences that they had been exposed to in the classroom. (see Appendix C)

Measurement of Outcomes

The first week of implementation an informal writing inventory was given to ascertain the reading and writing interest of the children. Another writing survey was to be given to ascertain the writing level of the children close to the end of implementation. The writer was to keep a log for recording unexpected events.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The tempo of the low achiever is at a much lower rate for learning skills in the classroom. Often this child is functioning with a language deficiency. These children require frequent repetition for learning skills. Their program should have concrete experiences, and experiences that will help them to develop good language skills. The literature recommends several activities that will help the children benefit.

Moore and Moore (1990) suggest collaborative writing strategies. Teachers suggest that children can generate their own writing activities by reading books aloud. Classroom journals provide a challenging activity for children in the classroom.

Strickland and Morrow (1990) suggest collaborative writing strategies are outstanding for helping the child to write well. The authors suggest creating a classroom environment that has emphasis on collaboration. Creating a community in the classroom is thought of as a good class environment for writing. A Burger King center, a post office and telephone directory, manipulatives with print

on them, walking around the neighborhood, construction of animals made from modeling dough and blocks, and a trip to the farm are good experiences for helping children to learn good writing skills.

According to Keifer (1988) a literature-based classroom provides an interesting and meaningful experience for children to learn. As children talk, draw, read, and write they begin to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the many experiences of good feelings and ideas. Children are able to listen to their teacher read to them, participate in silent sustained reading, Buddy read, recommend books to each other, and share and organize plays. In a literature-based classroom children enthusiastically respond to books in many ways.

Nelms (1987) relates that students who are active use language to express how they hear, see, and read. Language arts should be integrated with other subjects so that students may have the use of linguistic processes to help them understand. As teachers are involved in teaching social studies they may find it beneficial to make writing a regular activity. Children would begin to consolidate, and make their learning personal. It is necessary to use writing as a supplement to reading and the content areas.

Levstik (1983) asserts that children in elementary school have problems with other subjects aside from

reading and writing. A resource folder used in the classroom can provide an important context for encouraging children to interact, risk-take, and to evaluate their own learning. The children's knowledge, attitude, and participation improve as the children learn social studies using the resource folder. As the children become familiar with their culture they are using problem solving and making the learning meaningful. Often excitement is not a part of the social studies class because the materials, story, and historical issues are not made interesting. Concrete materials brought into the classroom can help children strengthen thinking skills, reinforce meaning, and reinforce comprehension.

Lemlech (1983) suggests children that are involved in active participation in the classroom involving social studies will effect achievement. In order for children to exhibit good social behaviors, the instructional process must reflect good teaching-learning activities. Because of the high concepts children become disillusioned and learning is not meaningful. When elementary students are participating in activities that are designed for them through concrete experiences, learning is activated. When the teacher is trying to develop social attitudes and other problem solving skills, there must exist a different set of behaviors. She must integrate, and link subject fields by providing children with experiences for linkage

and for underscoring consanguinity.

In order for learning to be successful teachers must plan for the children to acquire information and fundamental skill, manifest social strategies, improve themselves, and increase their skill in information-processing and problem solving. The elementary student may develop concepts through cassette tapes, television, films records, field trips, role playing, classroom responsibilities and participation in class.

Strickland and Morrow (1990) relate that integrating a school day come from the work of Piaget, Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Dewey. They indicated that a learning experience should be based on the interest of the child, and the instruction setting should be sense-oriented, manipulative, and active. Their belief is that children should have a setting where they can explore, play, and be curious. When children are involved in integration of content their interest and individual differences are pronounced.

Art permits children to explore using different kinds of paints and other art materials. When children discuss these materials while using them, their language flourishes. The teacher may use this time to help them propagate new language. Music, science, and social studies permit children to see purposes and reason for

them to learn literacy skills.

Nelson (1988) relates according to Piaget, children have difficulty putting emphasis on one aspect of a situation. They need concrete experiences that will help them to function well when confronted with new and difficult ideas. Dewey and Marietta Johnson suggested that content areas in the classroom be taught using drama. The integration of the content areas with language arts being taught through drama helps to bring motivation to its peak. Children, while role playing, speak, read, listen, and write. As drama is being highlighted in the classroom, it causes children to work, to make decisions, and to evaluate themselves and their classmates.

Another solution to helping the low achiever progress is the help of the parent. Parents can support the school and its program by helping and by showing an interest in the child's learning program, securing a good place for the child to work in the home, and providing rich experiences in the home environment.

Strickland (1990) points out that a child learns to read and write if the activities in his daily life are filled with active participation. A child's learning experience is more meaningful if the child, for example, is involved in helping to name the items on a recipe. The literacy storybook reading, and if the parents, caregivers and teachers are cognizant of the young children's

Bush (1989) discusses how students who are not able to read find many adverse activities to be involved in. Drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, unemployment, and aids are ways that they express their adversities. She explains how parents can play a strong part in helping the child to gain literacy skills at an early age. The home should be the beginning stage of exposure to reading and writing. There are some unfortunate situations where the parents are not able to read, and their children often follow their model. The schools in this country must be very strong in teaching literacy skills. Also, the school can be very influential in helping the parents to established a rich environment in the home for learning.

Potteer (1989) states how parents serve as the most important force in the child's life. The teacher's main responsibility is to help the child achieve. This job cannot be done very well if there is not a good home-school relationship. The teacher must try and establish a participatory role for the parents. Developing good participation from the parents initiates monitoring, and informing. For any parent participation program to be successful in a school, the administrators and teachers must have the right attitude and skills to help the family do well. Teachers must also monitor their program so as not to set objectives that the child and family cannot obtain.

Reutzel and Fawson (1990) discuss literacy development and the goal of children writing in school. In order for children to be successful in school parents must be participating in the learning process. The children need the help, aid, and assistance of the parents. Having the parents involved in the school process will help to increase the quality of the child's education. Although the school has the main role in organizing and coordinating the child's education, neither the parent nor the teacher can educate the child alone. The administrator and teacher must organize an effective program for enticing and motivating the parents to participate.

Description of Selected Solutions

The solution strategies indicated below were chosen according to the bibliographic research. Creative drama was used to provide children with opportunities to act out nursery rhymes, individual pantomimes, stories, and improvisations. The teacher conducted a read-aloud story time which included storybooks, concept books, informational books, poetry books, and books written by the children. Children were introduced to writing different styles of poetry; the couplet and the limerick. Manipulative tasks, such as cutting and pasting, tracing shapes, and making designs in sand were used to help

children refine their handwriting skills.

The children practiced manuscript writing on the chalkboard, which promoted the correct formation of different strokes and letters. Each child had an individual writing folder with samples of his/her work. The conduct of the folder was shared with parents during parent-teacher conferences to suggest ways that they could help their children with the mechanics of writing. Children had opportunities to write in both personal and dialogue journals. The journals gave the children practice in writing that was not graded. Classroom sharing took place during a regular time each week where children shared books, stories, and poems that they had written or read.

The following strategies focused on promoting the support aspects of the program. Parents were invited to volunteer in the classroom and serve as resource speakers in the classroom to help children improve skill development. An effort was made to add an abundance of books to the classroom library. Parents were informed of the language program in the classroom and how they could assist, both at home and in the classroom, with written and oral language. An adaptation of Ross and Roe's language arts techniques as described in An Introduction to Teaching The Language Arts (1989) was used to enhance the Classroom program.

On a typical day, twelve out of twelve children chose to read a book when assignments were completed. When the children were asked about their favorite stories they had heard or read during the week, all of them mentioned several titles. Stories that were written by the children reflected the variety of experiences that they had been exposed to in the classroom. When the children wrote their stories, eleven out of twelve of the children reflected their experiences. A survey of the children's reading and writing skills was made to find out if they were using the skills.

Approaches and methods used in the classroom were anticipated to accomplish the paramount goal of improving communication skills of the children.

Conceptual approaches to improving communication were to strengthen students' awareness of the underlying ideas that shaped their communication. Methods were used to design and give the children individual experiences with understanding the concept of concrete experiences to help maximize their need for comprehension, acquisition, and retention. The methods were also designed to help the children possess an enormous number of words that they knew very well and that they could provide for themselves when they were reading and writing.

The following procedures were helpful for implementation. The children were helped in seeing

themselves as successful writers by the teacher presenting positive and meaningful experiences. Checklists of skills to be monitored were constructed by the teacher. The children were introduced to more oral activities; pictures, props, and tape recorder. Supplies for writing were requisitioned. Letters were sent home to parents suggesting how they may help their children grow in language experiences. The children spent at least one hour a day directly involved in reading and associated activities other than those related to the basal program. A minimum of one hour a day was provided for writing and oral language.

Report of Action Taken

The solution strategy for this practicum began in April, 1992, after receiving approval to begin the implementation phase of the practicum. Soon after the approval was obtained, the principal was consulted. The supplies and other associated materials were accumulated, and the writer made the essential arrangements to begin.

The first week of the solution strategy began with an informal writing inventory (see Appendix D) that was given to ascertain the children's interest in writing. The children were encouraged to write creatively expressing their feeling, using their imagination, and experiences.

It was imperative that the children experience writing because it generates reading, and when children communicate through writing they draw on their language experiences, also.

It was beneficial for students that parents and teachers worked together to make the program more meaningful. Parents were asked to become active in the process by reading a book to their children each day. Initially, a reading inventory was to be given to the children, but because approval was not obtained from the publisher, this phase of the program was eliminated.

The second week of the solution strategy introduced motivational techniques to stimulate children to read. The classroom had a variety of reading choices for students. Books were displayed so that the children would find them intriguing. In the reading area in the classroom were materials to make the area comfortable. The children were given a certain time during the day to read through the displayed books.

The writer asked the children to share something that they had read. They shared a story, poem, or book that they had found enjoyable. They were not pressured to share orally, but they were given an option of showing a picture that was funny, exciting, or sad.

The children were encouraged to write creatively expressing their feelings using their imagination, and

experiences. They, also, had experiences constructing objects that represented some of the stories that they had read.

Parents were asked to become active in the process by reading a book to the children as a group each day. Children selected the books that they wanted the parents to read.

The third week of the solution strategy introduced the children to the integrated program. Whole group instruction made up the time that was in the language arts block. Beginning with 15 minute blocks of time, children had integrated work, and worked in small groups. Also, beginning with 30 minute blocks of time, children engaged in conversing with the teacher or students about their possible writing topics, or involved them in other related writing activities. Parents were encouraged to participate in the class activity.

On the fourth week the children began the buddy system. They read aloud and to each other. The classroom climate reflected equality. They understood that their contributions were accepted. After their basal reading activities, they were encouraged to collaborate on their writing assignments and to work in pairs. They wrote notes, journal entries, and personal stories reflecting on their feelings, actions, and thoughts.

The writer read books to the children and motivated

them to have a discussion. After the discussion the children were invited to share literature experiences. Parents were invited to volunteer to help the teacher in the classroom with special duties.

The fifth week focused on Big Books. Whole instruction provided children opportunities for practicing good conversational skills and other communication activities continued. The children were encouraged to collaborate on their writing assignments. They enjoyed creative drama which provided them with opportunities to acquire appreciation for literature, expand their vocabulary, and become familiar with story structure.

They shared book experiences by reading from Big Books which helped them to experience rich language, stimulated their imagination, and motivated them to read and write. They wrote notes to their parents inviting them to come and participate in their class activities.

The sixth week continued to focus on writing and drama was accentuated. The children had reading and writing activities that were functional. They had opportunities to explore, wrote notes, wrote journal entries, and practiced good conversational skills and other communication activities. The writer and the children selected appropriate writing projects to develop.

Creative drama helped to develop language skills as the children communicated with each other. They increased

their vocabularies, and learned problem-solving and social interaction strategies.

They had opportunities to read alone and with the writer. The writer read picture books to the children, and gave them time to engage in many different reading and writing experiences.

A letter was sent to the parents inviting them to share experiences with the children in the classroom, and to participate in a reading workshop at a later date.

The seventh week continued to focus on writing and drama. Whole group instruction that provided the children with good conversational skills and other communication activities continued. The children continued to work in small groups, and individually on writing skills.

They dramatized stories of characters from some of the stories that they had read. Drama helped the children to discover things about themselves and others, as well as form and unite their social growth and which led them to cooperate and communicate more in the classroom community.

The workshop for parents focused on whole language. The presenters encouraged parents to become learners with their children, to help them to feel good about school and excited about learning, and to provide opportunities for their children to read freely. The presenters demonstrated ways of reinforcing and upgrading their children's behaviors towards themselves and school.

The eighth week dealt with the writer helping the children to build self-confidence. The children continued to work in small groups, and individually on writing skills. They were given the opportunity of writing about their experiences, their interests, their personal problems, and their fears. The students showed growth in their speaking and writing activities, which indicated their potentiality for progress. They responded well to choral reading which was a superb way of expressing their imagination, thoughts, and feelings. They had opportunities to think about the poem and its mood meaning, and how they could help orchestrate its reading. Parents were invited to visit the class and listen to the children recite poetry.

The ninth week continued to focus on whole language. The children continued to read Big Books and shared with their classmates pantomines, choral speaking, and stories that they had written. Creative drama was exciting for the children because they were able to use their imagination, thoughts, and feelings. They learned how to use language better, and their self-concept was strengthened.

Individual and small group lessons were given on reading strategies. Parents were invited to help the children make books and accompany them on trips taken during the week.

The tenth week focused again on self-confidence. It is a known fact that children learn faster and better when what they are expected to learn is organized well and the way for them to learn is done in an orderly and systematic logical way. They must, in order to be successful, have competency and skill. This will help them to have self-confidence and self-esteem. Whole language instructions continued to be a dominant part of their learning.

The children were encouraged to ask their partners to help them with their writing content and form, and with their reading. They were reminded to write creatively expressing their feelings, using their imagination and experiences, and to engage in conversation with their teacher to increase their communication skills. Parents were invited to come and volunteer in the classroom and accompany the children on a class trip. The children began their rehearsal for their culminating activity to be given the twelfth week.

The eleventh week focused on rehearsal for the culminating activities. The children were asked to read and identify words and phrases that helped to create images, in their mind. Whole language continued to be a major activity that the children engaged in daily in reading and writing. They were asked to do choral readings, poems individually, lip sing, and drama for

their culminating activity.

Whole group activities were a major part of the children's activity. They read poems, stories, and books written by them. Parents were invited to come and volunteer in the classroom to help with the play and go on the weekly trip.

The final week involved the culminating activity and evaluation of the implementation period. The children continued to read Big Books and books written by them. They practiced creative drama, and explored real-life situations, to express their feelings and emotions. They continued to practice for the culminating activity, which provided them with experiences in many roles, for example, choral reading, drama, lip singing, and reciting poems individually.

The Performance was sensational. The children performed for the other classes in the building, and were excited, enthusiastic, and overjoyed to participate in the program. They worked together in organizing and preparing for the performance. It was a democratic venture because each of the students was able to participate. They were excited because they had learned through dramatic play to let their bodies, intelligence, creativity, spontaneity, and intuition come alive.

The culminating activity consisted of a play, Browndilocks and the Goldblatt Bears, poems, lip singing,

and choral readings. It was a great program because of the efforts of the children, parents, teachers, daughter of the writer, and administrative staff. Parents came and helped with the costumes, stage props, and decoration of the auditorium. The auditorium was decorated with over a hundred balloons, which were given to the children in the audience after the performance.

The children along with the parents helped to design their set which displayed simplicity. The costumes were made by parents, students, and the writer. Some of the costumes were purchased. The children who recited the poem, "Did You Feed My Cow," wore western costumes which included straw hats and red handkercheiefs. The children who lip sang, "Put Some Love In Your Heart," wore white shirts with dress pants. The bear costumes were made from brown felt.

A highlight of the program was the student who did a lip sing for the song, "On The Other Side of The Rainbow." This was one of the most moving and magnificent performances that the writer had seen of a seven year old. She was effective in using expressions and gestures to portray the meaning of the song to the audience. Another highlight was having the participation of a parent who recited the poem, "Mother To Son."

The play, "Browndilocks and the Goldblatt Bears," was narrated by the writer. It was a revised version of "The

Three Bears." The play was narrated by the writer as the children performed, and accompanied by recorded music that was appreciated overwhelmingly by the audience. Instead of the bears going to the forest, they went to Marshall Fields, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdales, and Carson Pirie Scott. This was confirmed by their shopping bags and gigantic sunglasses on their return from shopping.

The audience was thrilled with the performance. They congratulated the writer and the children. One teacher responded that this was the first program of its kind to be performed in the school. It was a program that entailed hard work, but it brought joy to many.

The children were evaluated by the writer. (see Appendix E) They were interviewed on two successive Fridays and asked what their favorite book or story that they had read or listened to that week. (see Appendix B) All of the twelve children chose to read during their free activity time. Parents discussed the reading and writing evaluations of their children.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION

Results

The problem that existed in this writer's work setting was that the children had little time for exposure to communication experiences after completing the basal reading series stories and accompanying workbook pages, spelling, phonic drills, and tests. The problem existed because the teachers were given manuals to follow when teaching the reading and related activities. They were expected to follow very closely what they were to do and say doing the lessons. It was also difficult to improve communication skills of the low achievers because of the entire class being involved in group lessons. These children spent much of their time on reading activities that "embrangled" the entire class. They needed more teacher-centered and more tightly monitored activities.

The low achievers needed opportunities to communicate because they lacked the experiences in interacting. These children needed interaction that was continuous, and a continuous process of opportunities that was formal and informal using communication experiences

in rich situations.

Many of the children come to school with numerous variations that affect the language program. They exhibit speech impairments, dialect differences, and other speech deficiencies that interfere with communication. They also bring more articulation problems than speech disorders, which include slurred speech, substitutions, omissions of letters, and distorted sounds.

They come to school with a lack of motivation to communicate because they have not been taught communication strategies. Many of them have not been exposed to activities that help them to learn to use language in the proper form.

There are differences in teaching practices, learning styles, and teacher-student reaction from one classroom to another. Teachers in working with children use their creativity, communication, and sensitivity to the needs of children differently. Some of these teacher's activities may be inconsistent with the integration of learning styles.

The solution to the problem was to provide repetition for learning skills. The program had to have concrete experiences, and experiences that would help them to develop good language skills. They were able to experience collaborative writing strategies, a literature-based classroom, language arts integrated with other subjects,

in rich situations.

Many of the children came to school with numerous variations that affected the language program. They exhibited speech impairments, dialect differences, and other speech deficiencies that interfered with communication. They also brought more articulation problems than speech disorders, which include slurred speech, substitutions, omissions of letters, and distorted sounds. It was evident that these children needed more opportunities to communicate in a variety of ways.

Specific outcomes were designed to achieve the goal. The following list includes each outcome and the results related to the outcome.

Outcome 1: It was projected that on a typical day, at least seven of the twelve children would choose to read a book when assignments were completed. (see Appendix A) Table 1 gives the result of this outcome relating 12 out of 12 children chose to read a book when they had completed their work.

Outcome 2: It was projected that when children asked about their favorite stories they had heard or read during the week, at least nine of the twelve children would mention several titles. (see Appendix B) Table 2 gives the result of this outcome relating that 12 children out of 12 gave several titles for their stories.

Table 4

Children Completing Basal Activities and Choosing Books to Read

	Number of Children	Yes	No
1. Did the child choose books to read after finishing morning work?	12	12	0

July, 1992

Table 5

Children Responding About Their Favorite Stories

	Number of Children	Several Titles	Smaller Number
1. What stories do you enjoy reading and listening to at home and in school?	12	12	0

July, 1992

Outcome 3: It was projected that stories written by the children would reflect the variety of experiences that they had been exposed to in the classroom. When the children wrote their stories, at least seven of the twelve children's stories would reflect their experiences. (see Appendix C) Table 3 gives the result of this

outcome relating that 11 out of 12 children's stories reflected a variety of experiences that interrelated the children's exposure to many experiences.

Table 6

Summary of Observation Checklist

	Number of Children	Yes	No
1. Does the child's stories reflect a variety of experiences?	12	10	2

Table 7

Attitude toward Writing Survey

	Number of Students-12			
1. I look like this when I write about myself.	12			
2. I look like this when I can write sloppy.	2			10
3. I look like this when I am writing in my special place.	12			
4. I look like this when I am writing at home with my family.	8	2		
5. I would look like this if I could not write.				12
6. I look like this when I write on the chalkboard.	10	1		1
7. I look like this when I read to the class about what I have written.	10			2
8. I look like this when I write about my toys.	12			
9. I look like this when my teacher tells me by writing is good.	12			
10. I look like this when my teacher reads my writing to the class.	12			

At the beginning of implementation, the Attitude toward Writing Survey (see Appendix D) was presented to the students. Table 4 is a tabulation of the twelve students responses to the writing survey. Of the twelve students shown in Table 4, it has been shown that the children have developed an interest in writing. Their responses relate that the children have reached a level that promises a potential for progress in writing. They understood that writing was a means of communicating their experiences and about things that interested them personally.

Table 8

Teacher Response to Survey Questions

Number of Students-12

		Yes	No
1.	Does the child read and reread books introduced by the teacher and other students?	12	
2.	Can the child discuss and write about books that he/she has read?	10	2
3.	Is the child able to organize words for writing?	10	2
4.	Does the child use imagination to develop writing skills?	12	
5.	Does the child spend at least an hour each day on non-basal reading related activities?	12	
6.	Does the child spend at least one hour a day on writing and oral language?	12	

In addition, the Teacher Response Survey (see Appendix E) found that the children benefited from the implementation period. Twelve of the children read and reread books exhibiting their exposure through repeated readings, ten of the children were able to discuss and

write about their books, ten of them were able to organize their words for writing, all of the twelve children used imagination to develop writing skills, each of the twelve children spent at least an hour a day on non-basal reading and related activities, and all of the twelve children spent at least an hour a day on writing and oral language.

Discussion

To ascertain the consequences of this practicum, qualitative and quantitative , documentation was scrutinized. The total number of children involved in this practicum was 12. The communication skills of the children advanced, and they gained maturity in reading and writing. They began to read more fluently with expression, and enthusiasm.

They were exhilarated as they read orally, reread books, practiced reading to parents and students, read independently, and discussed stories with their classmates. They were encouraged to use their language as an expression of individual feelings and aspirations. They were provided with ample experiences, in and out of the classroom, to equip them with an instrument of self-discovery and self-development. They were taught to use their communication skills effectively in speaking, writing, and in action.

Scientific studies have shown that the capability of communication emphasizes an important function both in intellectual development and in personality. At each age of development, children have their distinctive necessities for growth, as well as their necessities for techniques of reaction. Teachers must master how to develop the language arts program according to the needs of the students by setting goals that are realistic for them to accomplish. The language arts program should generate skill in all forms of communication through vernacular, by helping children to magnify instinct into the structure and productive use of their language and unfold their competence to read and listen.

As the child develops his ability to communicate he also develops himself. Children who are able to communicate with poise and complacency are more sociable and talkative. They must be cognizant of their ability and to face the effort of accomplishment by achieving self-reliance and self-esteem.

The school must provide an abundance of opportunities and experiences to the first grade low achievers in order for them to learn to share, to collaborate, to follow, to assess results, and to listen.

The writer feels that the students made great success in the three month period. They were able to use what they had read or heard by discussing, dramatizing, and

retelling.

A review and realization of the data collected related that the goals were achieved above what had been anticipated. The results ratified the writer's anticipations that if children are given more opportunities to communicate, they would become more skilled in their intellectual development.

This project succeeded because of the following factors. More time was allotted to building communication skills instead of isolated drills and practice exercises. The children had more communication experiences which included listening, speaking, writing, art, math, reading, and music. They were encouraged to be more actively involved in the learning process by being in activities that had more experimentation with the reading, speaking, listening, and writing processes. The teacher using language appropriately, listening and talking to them, and interacting with them about their reading and writing. Support came from the principal, parents, and several members of the staff.

Recommendations

Children must be consistent in their use of oral and written language throughout the school day. They must be involved in making plans, discussing problems,

dramatizing, collaborating, evaluating, and reading aloud. They must also be given opportunities to express their feelings orally and in writing.

Children need many experiences in choral speaking because this form of participation produces appreciation, explicit articulation, and a complacency that comes from working in a group activity.

Classrooms should have an abundance of materials for children to read: magazines, books, newspapers, comic books, and experience charts. Children must be encouraged to respect their own imagination, expressions, thinking,and creativity in expressing their thoughts, and feelings in their writing.

Dissemination

This practicum has been shared with, and made accessible to the teachers, administrative staff, and parents. Several of the teachers were elated with the final phase of implementation and related how stimulating it was to see children that had been labeled "slow" perform well in their activity.

The writer will also share practicum results with other classroom teachers at in-service meetings.

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APPENDIX A

CHECKLIST FOR BASAL READER PROBLEMS

AN OBSERVATION CHECKLIST FOR

BASAL READER PROBLEMS

Name of Student_____Age: years_____months___

Name of Observer_____Date of Observation_____

Symptoms of Basal Reader Problems

	1st Friday		2nd Friday	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Did the child spend 90-120 minutes completing basal reader activities?				
2. Did the child choose books to read after finishing morning work?				

APPENDIX B

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name a story that you enjoy.
2. Do you read books at home?
3. Do you listen to stories at home?
4. What stories do you enjoy reading in school?
5. What is your favorite story?

APPENDIX C

CHECKLIST WRITING

Observation checklist

Writing

Name of Student_____Age: years_____months____

Name of Observer_____Date of Observation_____

	Yes	No
1. Does the child maintain appropriate spacing between words?		
2. Does the child have appropriate letter spacing within words?		
3. Does the child need practice in writing sentences?		
4. Does the student know the mechanics of the language?		
5. Can the child create an idea, or short story?		
6. Does the child's stories reflect a variety of experiences?		

APPENDIX D

ATTITUDE TOWARD WRITING SURVEY

1. I look like this when I write about myself.

2. I look like this when I can write sloppy.

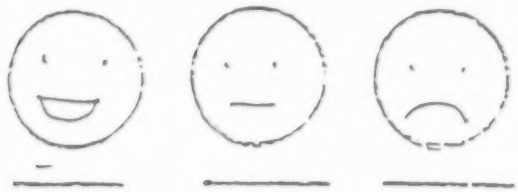
3. I look like this when I am writing in my special place.

4. I look like this when I am writing at home with my family.

5. I would look like this if I could not write.

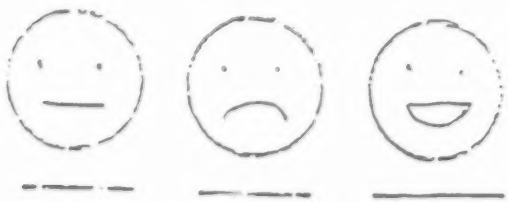
6. I look like this when I write on the chalkboard.

7. I look like this when I read to the class about what I have written.

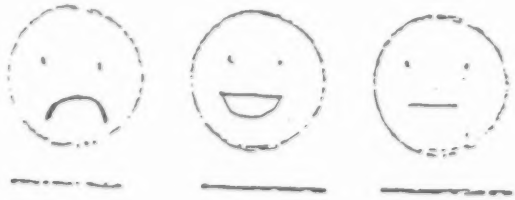


8. I look like this when I write about my toys.

9. I look like this when my teacher tells me by writing is good.



10. I look like this when my teacher reads my writing to the class.



APPENDIX E

SURVEY QUESTIONS OF TEACHER

SURVEY QUESTIONS OF TEACHER

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. Does the child read and reread books introduced by the teacher and other students?		
2. Can the child discuss and write about books that he/she has read?		
3. Is the child able to organize words for writing?		
4. Does the child use imagination to develop writing skills?		
5. Does the child spend at least an hour each day on non-basal reading related activities?		
6. Does the child spend at least one hour a day on writing and oral language?		

Name of Student_____Age: years____months___

Name of Observer_____Date of Observation_____